



ILLUSTRATION BY STACY CHAMBERS

### PRAYING FOR U.S. TROOPS

Stacy Chambers is a sophomore at Meridian High School. She likes drawing, being outdoors and reading, and is considering a career in art or psychology. Stacy's parents are Donna and Buddy Chambers and she has a younger brother. Here's what she said about her pencil sketch: "I chose to represent a young woman sending letters and praying for the soldier to come home again ... The soldier in the left-hand corner represents the men and women fighting for our country. The little girl represents the families of every soldier. She is praying for her dad, who is a soldier. The letters just represent all the letters sent to the soldiers — and from them."

## A 'caring and sharing' sergeant

This "Bragging Rights" story was submitted by John and Hazel Temple of Daleville. Their son, Sgt. Jonathan "J.C." Temple is a sergeant in the U.S. Army. "J.C." and his wife, Eboni, have one daughter, Jonaé.

By John and Hazel Temple  
special to The Star

Jonathan C. Temple — or "J.C." — is a 1988 graduate of Northeast Lauderdale High School. He entered the military in July of that year and was sent to South Carolina for basic training.

He had never been away from home and, at the age of 19, was sent off to Germany. The next thing I knew, he called home and said, "I'm being deployed to the Persian Gulf for Operation Desert Shield."

In Saudi Arabia, he served in Desert Storm and wrote home about things that were going on during the war — or at least the parts he was allowed to talk about.

I told him if someone was killed right beside you, and God was not ready for you to go, then it's not your time. I prayed for the safe return of our only son.

Jonathan is presently stationed in South Korea.

He is a caring and sharing person, willing to help others as much as he can — sometimes even putting himself last. We love and miss you. But, we're looking forward to seeing you for a visit sometime later this year.



Temple

## Dear Keon ...

This letter was submitted by LaKeia Kirksey, 12, a seventh-grader at Magnolia Middle School. LaKeia is writing to her cousin, Keon, who is a member of the Mississippi Army National Guard. He lives in Quitman.

Hi, Keon. This is your cousin, "Monac." We miss you a lot, even though you are not in Iraq yet. You are doing a really nice thing by going to a foreign country and fighting for the freedom of our country.

I know that you don't want to be over there, but just remember the people at home are rooting you on. One day, I know you will be home soon. I just wanted to let you know we pray for you every day.



LaKeia

Kirksey



SUBMITTED PHOTO

### MOVING THE MATERIEL

Lt. Roger Barajas of Meridian, right, is stationed at Camp Liberty, which was established around Baghdad International Airport. His job is to help move weapons and ammunition from the airport to warehouses at Abu Ghraib and other forward operating bases. He is shown with Senior Chief Petty Officer Terry Ryan, also of Meridian.

## Greetings from Baghdad from a fish out of water

Lt. Roger L. Barajas is assigned to the Naval Technical Training Center at Naval Air Station Meridian. He received "TAD" orders — or orders for "temporary additional duty" — and left Meridian Nov. 21 for deployment to the Multi-National Security Transition Command in Baghdad, Iraq.

Roger says Camp Liberty is an unusual sort of community, but a community nonetheless, where a lot of the comforts of home exist in microcosm: "The living conditions are not what I expected; they are far better than I imagined."

By Roger Barajas  
special to The Star

Greetings from Iraq! My name is Lt. Roger Barajas, U.S. Navy, and I am currently assigned to the Multi-National Security Transition Command.

Our mission is to recruit, train, outfit and equip the Iraqi military and police forces so they will be able to properly defend themselves and their citizens against the insurgents.

Right now, I am working for the J4 (Logistics) branch, and my job is to facilitate the movement of weapons and ammunition from Baghdad International Airport to our warehouses at Abu Ghraib and other forward operating bases.

I'm living at Camp Liberty, which was established in the area surrounding the airport. It serves as the home base for the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division out of Ft. Hood, Texas, so Senior Chief Petty Officer Terry Ryan (another Meridian sailor who is serving out here) and I are quite literally fish out of water on a base of 20,000 U.S. Army soldiers.

The living conditions are not what I expected; they are far better than I imagined.

Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR), one of the major contractors, has done an amazing job of providing comfortable accommodations. Just about everyone lives in a trailer, two to a room, with air conditioning and heaters. Hot water showers, clean bathrooms and free laundry facilities are just a few short steps away.

And while it's not as comfy as my place back in

Meridian, it sure beats the small stateroom I lived in on my last ship!

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) has several Post Exchanges (PX's) on the base where you can buy the latest music and movies, junk food, toiletries and other assorted items sales-tax free.

The dining facilities serve four meals a day and it's basically all-you-can-eat.

The Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department operates 24-hour recreation centers where soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines can go to relax in their off-duty time. There are video game lounges, computers for writing e-mail or chatting online, telephone centers to call home and big screen televisions for watching ESPN via satellite.

The weather so far hasn't been too bad. It's wintertime here, too, so it's relatively cool during the day and somewhat chilly at night.

Ironically, the most unwelcome part of living in a desert is the occasional rain shower. Even a slight drizzle turns the sand to mud and leads to a lot of messy inconvenience, especially when the large tanks and Humvees start tearing up the road.

All in all, life out here isn't too bad. The most important thing on everyone's mind is completing our mission and helping the Iraqi people recover from the years of oppression they suffered at the hands of Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party.

The sooner we do that, the sooner we'll all be back home, safe and sound.

Read about Kristina Makey's

### Pen pals

in the Health and Medical section.